

# RESEARCH SUMMARY

## Ecobehavioral Analysis of the Experiences of Students with Complex Support Needs in Different Classroom Types

Though a majority of students with complex support needs are placed in restrictive special educational settings such as resource, self-contained, and separate school classrooms, they are less likely to experience interaction or instruction and are more likely to experience distraction than those whose placements are in general education classrooms, according to a recent study.

The study, which involved 116 students with complex support needs in grades K-6 across the country, looked at student behaviors, educator behaviors, and classroom ecology in four environments: general education classrooms, resource rooms, self-contained classrooms, and classrooms in separate schools.

It found that students with complex support needs in separate schools were nearly five times more likely to give responses unrelated to academic content than students in general education classrooms. Students in separate schools were more than five times more likely to be out of the room or on a break than students in general education classrooms. In separate schools, students were three times more likely to be focused on a paraprofessional and three times more likely NOT to be focused on a certified teacher or peer.

In terms of educator focus, the study found that the odds of observing no one interacting with a focus student was almost twice as high in self-contained classrooms than in general education and more than four times higher in separate schools. The likelihood that an educator was focused on no one was more than two times higher in self-contained classrooms and almost three-and-a-half times higher in separate schools. The odds of an educator's focus being on other adults (relative to the focus student or

### KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- General education classrooms offer better interaction and instruction for students with complex support needs.
- Students with complex support needs in restrictive educational settings are less likely to experience peer or educator interaction or instruction than those in general education classrooms.
- Students with complex support needs in restrictive educational settings are more likely to experience distraction than those in general education classrooms.
- No evidence supported the idea that self-contained classrooms or separate schools offer superior instruction or supports to students with complex support needs than general education classrooms.

other students) was nearly three times higher in resource rooms and self-contained classrooms and more than seven-and-a-half times higher in separate schools. Intervals of nonacademic instruction were nearly one-and-a-half times higher in self-contained classrooms and nearly three times higher in separate schools than in general education classrooms. The likelihood of educators issuing a correction to students was

*(continued)*



slightly lower in self-contained classrooms, but the use of restraint was almost eighteen times higher than in general education classrooms.

The odds of a focus student working with the whole group, a small group, or a peer were lower in resource rooms, self-contained classrooms, and separate schools than in general education classrooms. However, the likelihood of a focus student being distracted by a staff member was more than two-and-a-half times higher in self-contained classrooms and nearly twelve times higher in separate schools.

The study's findings provide no evidence to support the idea that self-contained classrooms and classrooms in separate schools offer superior instruction or supports to students with complex support needs than general education classrooms. On the contrary, the study supports the assertion that the needs of students with complex support needs are better met in general education classrooms.

Zagona, A. L., Kurth, J. A., Lockman Turner, E., Pace, J., Shogren, K., Lansey, K., Jameson, M., Burnette, K., Mansouri, M., Hicks, T., & Gerasimova, D. (2022). Ecobehavioral analysis of the experiences of students with complex support needs in different classroom types. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(4), 209–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221126496>

